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DON'T FORGET THE CREDIT

There's a bloody good reason why a rider like Jonathan Rea has been popping up frequently on the cover of OTOR and within these pages and the question of whether there has been another motorcycle racer more prolific on the asphalt since the 30 year old jumped on the Kawasaki barely needs asking. JR might be an MX fan and his social media exploits with the entire Rea clan is nothing less than endearing but the guy is the definition of a 'world champion'...making the current fuss about 'equalising' WorldSBK a little dispiriting for Team65. Enjoy the Rea era (and frequent Davies scraps) while it lasts...

Photo by GeeBee Images







FAMILIAR GROUND

Facing the same acclimatisation to the hurried one-day AMA Lucas Oil Pro Motocross format that other Grand Prix converts have mined, former MX2 GP winner Dylan Ferrandis has nevertheless thrived and turned heads in his first transatlantic term and after bowing out of GP this time last year with a broken arm. At Southwick a first chequered flag was bagged

Photo by Cudby/Shepherd

RAILING

Stung by words and prodded by pride into the kind of moto-cross form that we've come to expect, Eli Tomac has now done the hat-trick 'Outdoors' after his latest success at Southwick. The Monster Energy Kawasaki rider seems to invite bouts of adversity but also has an unmatchable ability to raise the game. Does Blake Baggett have any cards left to play?

Photo by Cudby/Shepherd





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Race two winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki



WORLDSBK USA

THE NEXT EPISODE

Gallery & Blog by Graeme
Brown/GeeBee images





WORLDSBK USA





WORLDSBK USA



STOP THE SHUFFLING...

There has been a lot of pontificating recently about what should and shouldn't be done with the WorldSBK Championship from sections of the media who either never, or only once a year, visit the World Superbike paddock. The recent interview with Dorna supremo Carmelo Ezpeleta, where he suggested the technical rules be changed to restrict the race machines to a 'stock' setup, gave them fresh impetus to shuffle in their armchairs and hammer the keyboard.

I have spoken a lot about the dominance of Kawasaki and Ducati over the last few years but in that same period there have been a number of regulation changes in an attempt to share out the podium places with other teams and riders. The most recent was the shuffling of grid positions after race one – a huge success (ahem) – Tom Sykes came from eighth on the grid in race two at Laguna, to first, in the space of 3 corners.

This current furore was the main topic of conversation on the way to California, pretty much all weekend and still rumbles on.

I met Steve Guttridge from Kawasaki Europe in Heathrow airport before we left the UK. I also spoke with Paul Denning

again about the topic as well as Marco Chini from Honda when I was at the race. Generally when the subject was raised there was a collective rolling of the eyes. No one in the WorldSBK paddock seems to have an appetite for more regulation changes. For sure the team at the top of the tree are unlikely to want anything to change but it's interesting that a few of the others down the order feel the same.

I also managed to have a brief chat with the man in day-to-day control of WorldSBK, Daniel Carrera and he confirmed that the comments from Ezpeleta are a clear intention to bring the WorldSBK product closer to the street bikes. There is a feeling within Dorna that the current level of performance clearly

shows that most of the teams are not able to reach it.

To my mind much of the perception comes from the MotoGP paddock, where a lot of the pontificating comes from as well. I am sure many are still smarting at Jonathan Rea's lap times from the test in Jerez at the end of last year, where he set the fastest time amongst some exalted MotoGP teams and riders.

At the moment Dorna are happy with the show between Kawasaki and Ducati but they want to see more bikes and manufacturers at the top. Who doesn't? However, Carrera made a telling comment; that Dorna understand that in previous years there was a fight between the Superbike and MotoGP classes – SBK gave freedom

By Graeme Brown



on the technical regulations that increased the costs and brought the bikes more to a prototype standard. Dorna's view was, and is, that it's important therefore to find a better balance to provide better opportunities for people competing in the championship, and marketing wise bring WorldSBK closer to street bikes.

On face value it would appear that there is still a feeling of competition between the MotoGP and Superbike series, despite them being controlled by the same organization.

A quick look at the FIM technical regulations for WorldSBK is quite revealing. The word 'homologated' gets a real work out. Chassis, engines, fuel injection etc must be as homologated, i.e. as on the standard road bike. Other components such as suspension, brakes and engine covers have to come from an 'Approved List of Components', these have a price cap and must be available to purchase for any team.

There is a lot of talk of a 'standard' ECU being imposed, much the

same as MotoGP. In WorldSBK the ECU's are restricted to those on the 'Approved List' and again the price for the unit, the dash and all the wiring is capped at 8000 euros. On top of that, 'factory' appointed teams on that list must distribute system upgrades to 'privateer' teams.

So when you look at all that I don't think you can get much more 'stock' for the regulations. The perception that the bikes are close to prototype is, in my view, hugely misplaced.

Race machines, particularly, in a world championship have to have an air of exotica about them. It's what gets us all excited; a touch of carbon fibre here, some CNC milled finishing detail there is all it can take some times to get the juices flowing. If we wanted to see a bunch of road machines racing we would all be at our local circuit, watching club racing.

I therefore understand the general feeling amongst those in the Superbike paddock that the current regulations are fine and that other teams need to work harder to

push Ducati and Kawasaki. More than anything, however, a period of stability is needed. Not further changes.

Paul Denning from Yamaha echoed what we had discussed in Misano. That the regulations were fine and that it was up to the other teams to step up to the same standard as Kawasaki and Ducati through the development of their package and riders.

One manufacturer that is enduring a terrible time at the moment is Honda. Would a further change to the regs benefit them? Whilst the current SBK programme is coordinated from Honda Europe, Japan still has an influence. The current directions coming to the SBK arm is that there will be no further commitment to WorldSBK whilst the technical regulations are continually being changed. However, it has been reported that they have already looked into changing the electronics package on the bike from Cosworth to Marelli, but testing time is limited and further regulation change would not help in terms their current development programme and budget.

The same feeling was echoed in the MotoAmerica paddock at Laguna Seca. The guys there have been working hard to raise the profile of their Superbike series after the disastrous tenure of Daytona Motorsports Group. The FIM are trying to standardize all Superbike regulations throughout the world and MotoAmerica has fully embraced the concept. Apparently MotoAmerica management had a meeting on Saturday evening at Laguna and agreed that they wouldn't be changing their regulations anytime soon. The manufacturers in the States were committing to the series and it's current technical rules and they didn't want to jeopardize that even if WorldSBK regs were changed.

But if Dorna are looking at this with MotoGP tinted glasses on, is it not a little hypocritical given the situation in that paddock? Since 1983 the 500cc, and now MotoGP, championship has been won every year by either Yamaha or Honda with the minor exceptions of Suzuki in '93 with Schwantz and Kenny Roberts Jnr in 2000, and Stoner on the Ducati in '07. I don't hear anyone shouting from the rooftops

that MotoGP needs a dramatic change to break that domination. So why in WorldSBK? It was 20 years between championship wins for Kawasaki so now they have won three in the last four years is that really a reason to stick a big spanner in and tinker again?

There has been a drive in the GP paddock to reduce costs and allow closer racing and, to be fair, it has succeeded and we have seen some really great action in the last few years. However, lets be honest, unless you are on a blue Yamaha or an orange Honda you have little hope of challenging for the title let alone winning it.

My current worry is that this suggested wholesale dumbing down of the machinery is going to drive manufacturer-backed teams away from the WorldSBK series. If Honda are putting the brakes on their development until a clear route is given and both Aprilia and BMW have suggested that they will leave the series if a standard ECU is introduced, what would we end up with? A series dominated by Kawasaki and Ducati.

One other person I spoke to on the way to California was Stuart Higgs, current boss of British Superbike and Race Director for MotoAmerica. He had joined in a twitter conversation and pointed out that in Superstock 1000 the 'current best bike' dominates. With manufacturers increasing the lead times on the introduction of new road bikes you could see a single manufacturer dominate for a few years until a newer, better street bike comes out. Altering technical rules won't change that.

As Paul Denning said, as I have said, and many people are now repeating, regardless of technical regulations, the best rider, in the best team, on the best machinery pretty much always wins.

In my mind the last thing WorldSBK needs right now is more upheaval. Lets just get on and enjoy what there is at the moment. Who knows, Jonathan Rea and Chaz Davies might sign for Suzuki in 2019.

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FEATURE



MOVING THE MILESTONE

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

TALKING WITH SUZUKI'S JEREMY SEEWER AS
HE HOVERS ON THE EDGE OF HISTORY

FEATURE

38 points. At the time of writing Suzuki's Jeremy Seewer needs to peg back this distance to Red Bull KTM's Pauls Jonass over seven rounds to not only be the first title winner for the Japanese with the RM-Z250 but also for Switzerland in the premier categories of the FIM Motocross World Championship. To increase the weight of the potential milestone that #91 is carrying then his current age of 23 years means 2017 is his last shot at MX2 glory before he leaps – still with the factory 'yellow' – into MXGP next season.

Accessible and friendly – so much so that one member of the Suzuki team in 2015 said to me that he really hoped the youngster would not change under the approaching lights of pressure and profile – Seewer's rise in Grand Prix has been textbook. He has benefitted from the close support of his family and some key backers in Switzerland (a quiet hotbed of the sport but long-starved of notable GP winning athletes until three came along at once with Arnaud Tonus, Valentin Guillod and the Suzuki stalwart) to progress tidily through the ranks.

"WHEN YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR A TITLE IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND A GOOD BALANCE IN YOUR HEAD TO GO OUT THERE FOR THE WIN TO BE HONEST..."

Spotted and nurtured by Suzuki International Europe (Germany) to the degree that he was thrown into the MX2 deep end back in 2012 when the works team had injury problems, Seewer has plotted a path to the peak of the sport and has barely broken stride. EMX250 wins came



in 2013 (he was European Championship runner-up), he was 10th in his first MX2 season in 2014, rose to 5th in 2015 when he had finished his engineering studies and was finally able to train full-time and spend more riding hours in Belgium close to the Lommel-based team and



moved up to 2nd in 2016. So far this 'Herlings-free' MX2 term he has won his first Grand Prix and held the red plate as championship leader but has found stiff resistance from another athlete in the KTM stable.

10-5-2 in three years: that's impressive going and without any discernible injury. There is only one digit left to grasp.

In 2017 Seewer has had to deal with the mantle of team leader as Suzuki's MXGP set-up moves through a state of flux with

Kevin Strijbos sitting on the sidelines and most certainly contemplating the end of his enormous history with the brand and rookie Arminas Jasikonis bouncing off the ropes in exciting and unpredictable fashion. He also has the new RM-Z250 to refine and young teammates in the forms of Bas Vaessen and Hunter Lawrence snapping at the chance to share some impact. Over his head hangs the ticking clock of his age and the knowledge that he is in the midst of a valuable and rare opportunity to etch letters in the history books.

FEATURE

On the track and Seewer has rarely been faster or more aggressive. His first moto stalk and demotion of Jonass (two years his junior) in Portugal two weeks ago was masterful. However, Jeremy has led less than a quarter of the laps Jonass has fronted in MX2 and this has been down to the questionable starting prowess of the RM-Z out of the metal gate; an issue that has to be rectified for the final seven fixtures if Suzuki want to dream of a first major GP title in ten years.

We speak in the thankfully air-conditioned race truck at the sweltering Ottobiano circuit for the Grand Prix of Lombardia. Seewer would take the first of back-to-back GP wins in Italy and then rule again in Portugal a week later. We've produced feature content with Jeremy each year of his MX2 rise but sitting opposite the Swiss on this occasion we're struck by his quiet confidence. Previously there was a boyish aspect to Jeremy's demeanour but here was a mature, physically prime and slightly more weathered athlete to the demands and rigours to the many dimensions of being one of the sports protagonists.

Seewer is a capable champion-in-waiting and it is hard to imagine that Jonass will not have an almighty tussle on his hands until the finish at round nineteen in France. For the third time in four years MX2 could go down to the very last laps.

You've progressed quickly and steadily up the ranks to now be fighting for a world championship: is this how you expected it to be? Or are things harder or more pressurised than you anticipated?

It's a good question because some guys either have this experience only for a short time or they work so hard but never really get into a position like I am. I have gone step-by-step and I remember my manager saying 'in three years you'll be fighting for the world title' and



JEREMY SEEWER



O FEATURE

I believed in that but it also sounded a bit unrealistic when you are just around the top ten...but we're doing that now. You dream of this as a kid and when you arrive here it's like life isn't real. You only think about getting 'it' done and try to enjoy every moment of it. I know not many riders or sportsmen are able to really fight for a title. It is kinda special, and you lose some days and win on others but I really try to enjoy this part of my life. Is it hard? It is always difficult to think about how it will be before you arrive but now I am in the fight for the title then it is never easy! There are a lot of things going on in your head – and that is one of the most important parts. I knew this [mental struggle] was coming and could prepare myself and I knew it would be tough. It is challenging GP-to-GP to keep loose and focussed: if you want to win so badly then you put too much pressure on yourself, be too nervous, too aggressive and make too many mistakes but if you go the opposite way and try to be relaxed then you can be too relaxed! So it is difficult to find a good balance in your head to go out

there for the win to be honest. Before, it was about second or third and of course that matters but it's not quite the same as pushing for a win.

It must be complicated because a moto is no longer just a straightforward race: you also have to be thinking about points, Pauls' position, bike development and being the lead rider/figure for a team and brand...

That's true. In the past it was just a case of 'doing your best' – and that is what I try to do now also and have fun – but there is much more going on in your head because of that thought about the title. And you cannot change that. Points and positions come into your head automatically. Of course I try to block that out as much as possible and I'm also pretty good at that but it's always there and I don't think any human brain can avoid thinking about the bigger picture. What you say about bike development is also true; KTM have their advantages and we also have some and it is difficult to keep that level the same through the whole season.



People tended to see you as a fast and blossoming rider that didn't make too many mistakes. Perhaps the last question about you concerns an ability to put a championship campaign together. Do you feel you are being judged in that respect?

Yeah and I felt it last year [winter] as vice-champion. It is only second place but people look to you for that position. When you are fifth and sixth then I don't think you notice it too much but finishing second puts that expectation there. I don't quite know how to explain how I deal with this but it is more about putting pressure from others to one side. The most important thing is 'me' and what I want and what my goals are. If you fail from pressure then it's self-induced not from other people saying 'can he do it?' and trying to reach their estimation... it is more from what you want to achieve.

Do you feel at the sharp end because this is the last try at MX2?

Actually this doesn't bother me at all. I'm already quite looking forward to step up to the main class and the 450s. It doesn't

matter how this [MX2] will end because I am already looking at the next class. I was thinking 'this is the last chance to be champion in 250s' last year but while the season has been going on it doesn't bother me that I'm going to be too old and I have to move. I saw other guys in their last year that were trying too much and they blew themselves up because they realised 'I have to go all or nothing' and it didn't work.

Do you think that might be affecting Benoit Paturel to a degree? Many had him pegged to be in the title fight...

That could be true and he is not under a contract yet for the 450s – maybe now he is I don't know – and this makes it more difficult because you need to show the results. My future is planned and I have two years. I've done a race already with next year's bike, which was really positive, so however it ends for me I'm really excited to go up and race the big boys next year.



FEATURE

Maybe it's a silly question but will you be really disappointed if you are second again this year? It is not a terrible result...

Of course I would be. I think if you have that mentality to win then you'll always be disappointed to leave the track or a championship with second. Last year I was quite happy with it because it was planned...but this year we planned something else and if it doesn't work then I will not be happy. Some years later I might look back and think that second place was not that bad but for sure the disappointment will be big now...that's why we'll try to avoid it and really go for that championship.

You've always been quite a humble and realistic guy and haven't talked-yourself-up too much or chatted about beating Herlings in the past...

That's true and I won't lie to myself and say 'I'll win this and that' or 'I'll beat him' when I know it will be very hard or I'm not 95% sure. I think that approach [being realistic] can help you in life in general and not to be too cocky. It has helped me sometimes...but then perhaps I should have been more 'on the point' sometimes. I have other strong points and I know about them and that's quite important.

You're a versatile rider that can be smooth, aggressive and very adaptive but how do you feel about your riding in 2017? Did you think you'd be at the front more? Or are you satisfied with the nine podiums and four wins to-date?

It's a good question and it kinda depends on the GP. At the beginning of the year I was not happy at all – even if we did end up with the red plate at one stage – and I was already looking ahead and towards

the next GPs because I knew our starts were not good enough at that time. It was so tough with the tracks and I think the MX2 class has become more intense at the front for passing and fighting. It was not a struggle but it was not easy: in Qatar I was 12th and 5th because my starts were so bad and it was nearly impossible to pass. I wasn't doubting myself and my riding...but I couldn't bring the results I wanted. I've won a couple of motos but haven't had a perfect Sunday yet. I was riding really well in Ernée [France] but because I was sixth at the start then I couldn't catch Jonass or Paturel despite being both aggressive and smooth and very fast. I was disappointed with third. [thinks] Overall I think the feeling is a good one and we know within the team that we are a small MX2 effort compared to something like KTM and we make them work hard and we're competitive.

Talking about Suzuki and a brand you have been with for most of your racing career, is it still a team and effort in transition? How do you feel about it? Is there still an element of discovery?

The whole team has been moving a lot in the last two years and Stefan has been trying to bring his mentality to it...and it's quite different than Sylvain [Geboers] was. I think he wants to push it in a good way and we've seen already that he was able to make some good moves like bringing Hunter Lawrence in, who will be a great prospect for next year, and some of the other guys. I think the guys [in the team] are realising what is going on also. It is difficult though because the Japanese like to stick to their plans and ways and it can be hard to suddenly change things. So everything needs time to adapt but they are really pushing hard

JEREMY SEEWER



with the new 450 and as far I can see in Suzuki they give all they can for the main class – MXGP and the 450s – and only this year they have altered their view because they are progressing there and looking at youngsters like Arminas, who I think is doing really well and will be good guy for the future, so 2017 has become about the 250s. For the last two years the MX2 programme has been based around me, which is something that has fit me really well.

With respect to Arminas Jasikonis and Kevin Strijbos do you think 2018 will be tricky as well? If you were alongside a championship contender and someone who fills the spotlight then there would be less pressure and expectation on you...

That's true. It would take a lot of pressure away if you were next to a 'big guy', 'big name' who would be fighting for the championship because you'd be the number two and you could learn a lot. If it's [only] Arminas and I then we'll be more or less on the same level and it changes the story...but I don't mind too much. I know it will be a rookie year and the 450s are really tough at the moment. It is not easy to fight for P5 or even the top ten but I'm just going to give my best and see where we are at the first race.

You are a star of MX2 at the moment but in a few weeks at the Swiss GP you will hit a new level. You had a glimpse of that in 2016, so how do you think Frau-enfeld will be this time?

Last year was everything was so perfect. My season was going well, the weather



JEREMY SEEWER

year I had special livery and helmet and we were thinking through the winter about something better for this year and we've achieved that; so I'm looking forward to show that to the fans and have some fun.

What about riding and racing the RM-Z450? Will it require much learning and adjustment on your part? Will it be an interesting winter?

For sure it will be interesting because the bike is still new. I've done some riding and practice on the old 450 and I felt happy on that bike. Stefan said I could do a race in Germany with the new 450 racebike so I accepted the challenge and it was so, so different. It left me wondering how I'd feel about changing machinery because I have no reference or experience. I then rode the old 450 again and was shocked how much of a step had been made between the two bikes. It is really positive. I think I need to get a little bit stronger and grow some muscle bulk but in a way it is almost easier for me to ride a 450 because the power is there and I just need to get a feeling for the struggle. Everyone says the 450s are so fast and difficult to handle but you don't have to go wide-open everywhere. You just need to get a good feeling to go quickly for thirty-five minutes and this will be the key for the winter.

Has much changed away from the bike for you? You were studying a lot up until two years ago and that prevented you moving to Belgium...

Yes, but not too much compared to 2016. If I look back before last year then I am able to be more in Belgium and dedicate myself more to riding and training; and it changed things for me a lot. 'Home' seems to have become another place and I've started to have good friends in Belgium and I can practice whenever I want. That kind of stuff is all positive for the career.

for the GP was perfect and all the circumstances around that weekend were great. I will always remember it as one of the highlights of my career so far [Seewer was second to Max Anstie after fighting for the win in both motos]. This year – if everything comes together again – then I think we can top it.

Can you visualise that top step?

Yeah, I was home recently and the track is not far from my place and they'd finished building part of it. The media attention is also growing through the Swiss television. It is slowly growing-up. Last



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FAIR PLAY...

It is always curious to see how different motorcycle racing series function and – especially – how they try to evolve. The recent topic and debate in WorldSBK about rule-levelling and technical ‘meddling’ to forage for some sort of parity and move away from the dominant two-tone shade of green and red colouring the championship, feels like another case of ‘reaching’. MotoGP had its own soul-search for a number of years through engine capacity and was compelled to install a standard ECU and control tyre with a couple of fingers nervously tapping the wallet.

In motocross a sense of ‘purity’ prevails (thankfully?) when it comes to the rulebook, the ethos of prototype racing and the FIM’s decree that the man is more important than machine.

We’re talking different beasts and different sports (even if they all involve steering a motorcycle as quickly as possible around a closed circuit) so I’m well aware my comparison is a little tenuous) but I struggle to recall anybody in motocross hovering over the panic button when Tony Cairoli was owning six premier class world championships in a row; the first two with different bikes and manufacturers, just to highlight the Sicilian’s brilliance in 2009-2010. An even more extreme example came from

the USA (where there are tighter technical guidelines with production motorcycles) with Ricky Carmichael and James Stewart making AMA rivals and racers (some would say the fans as well) suffer through three perfect seasons in 2002 and 2004 (Carmichael) and 2008 (Stewart) where they didn’t lose an outdoor moto: 24 in total each time...and with the old ‘weekend’ National format.

My personal opinion when it comes to WorldSBK is that hardly any of the current crop would be able to replicate the level and results of Jonathan Rea and Chaz Davies on their respective machinery. Invert the grid and try what other gimmickry there is to-hand but when there is a different level in the pack

– as there was for MXGP between 2009-2014 and some would say there still is – then it’s just an indicator of the cyclical nature of sport and how one or several exceptional athletes come along and make their mark. In Cairoli’s case he moved from winning the MXGP crown at the first attempt with a stock Yamaha to claiming KTM’s very first in the premier category with a prototype 350 experiment that was the last great definition of technical risk-taking in Grand Prix; it was a stunning achievement. He stretched the form and confidence for another four seasons and after two years mired with injury problems seems set to hand KTM their first crown with the 450 SX-F (going on current form and evading another dose of misfortune).



By Adam Wheeler

Cairolì and KTM have prevailed despite MXGP hoisting five different race winners each season on average and a total of fourteen riders have won on a 450 in the last half a decade. Has there been any attempt to quell a sense of dominance? Hardly any. The FIM were quick to limit the influence of ride-by-wire electronics when the four-strokes hurried along their initial path of development and teams can only download and read data from the bikes once back in the paddock (that could even change in the future with live GPS technology potentially adding new informative and entertainment strand to television coverage).

The rudimentary layout of a motocross bike means that Gautier Paulin's factory Husqvarna like might involve a tightly-wound and intricate network of cables and sensors around the bars and upper chassis but the rider will still have only the choice of two maps and a 'start' (throttle assistance) switch for getting out of the gate. There is no magic solution or option, and often riders will vary little from the base

set-up they will have established in pre-season testing for power delivery and suspension settings depending on the terrain. When it comes to tyres Pirelli are the most successful brand but there is competition from the likes of Dunlop and Michelin. Perhaps the biggest move towards 'squaring-off' MXGP came this year with the metal grill in the gate negating the need for ground prep and removing riders' idiosyncrasies for race starts. It was a new phase for the sport...but Cairolì and KTM are still right at the front most weekends.

Towards the middle and end of the last decade there was enough concern about the speed and power of 450cc motorcycles to bring together FIM and AMA officials and promoters to think-tank the situation and the future. The 450s are still in play and Cairolì's 350 SX-F sits nicely in the halls of Mattighofen close to Mr Pierer's office. What electronics have done is help curb the ferociousness of the engine potential. The buzz words have become 'usable power' and there is no straight-forward recipe for this either: just

look at the work done by Jeremy Van Horebeek in 2014 to tame the factory Yamaha that had led to injury nightmares for Steven Frossard and Joel Roelants and the current mire for Romain Febvre who is trying to get his head around the best set-up with the '17 YZ450FM and before the team launch vibrantly into work with the new 2018 model. Honda have turned their electronic system and effectiveness into something of an art and the traction and hook-up carried by Evgeny Bobryshev, Tim Gajser and Gautier Paulin was visually clear last season alone.

Off-road bike testers across the international media pack will endeavour to separate and find distinctions between production 450s but the common opinion for several years runs along the lines of just how good, enjoyable and reliable (electric starts all round?!) the bikes are now. KTM is no longer the only torque animal in the pack.

That's not to say that jealousy doesn't exist. It was only three years ago that KTM felt compelled

to ask FIM officials into the workshop area of their racetruck to scrutinise Tony Cairoli's 350 SX-F whereupon the engine was almost stripped and the cylinder duly measured. I was there to offer some journalistic 'credence' on the process and produced a fairly bullish set of quotes from the Austrian crew in defiance of those that claimed Cairoli was claiming holeshot after holeshot thanks to a different engine spec.

The FIM have done well to retain the 1650m track length stipulation (although it has proved to be a rule of thumb rather than a hard dictation as the cases of Namur and Glen Helen have proved) to quell the average speed of the layouts, and the modernisation of motocross courses have also played a part in swinging the onus from one rider/team to the next on almost a weekly basis.

If the MXGP rulebook looks in good trim although a little archaic (where will the next innovation come from and will the guidelines be able to shift?) then the

onus falls onto the rider and the most exquisite and vital component of motocross racing success. The strongest, most technical, smartest, hard-working and luckiest athlete prevails. Looking at the 'rider' instead of the 'ride' does start to present other questions and one in particular that has never been fully explored or addressed: doping. Is it naïve to assume that motorcycle racing's hardest discipline is clean and without suspicion? Testing is fairly frequent – and it has to be pointed out without any discernible cases - but a closer look at a subject that many don't even want to talk about apart from the odd rumour is well overdue.



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scott sports: prospect

www.scott-sports.com

We highlighted the 2018 line of Scott's Prospect goggle in the last issue and the presentation that took place at the Grand Prix of Lombardia but here is a look at a few more of the colours and designs that carry a slightly more retro theme. The Prospect has been a good seller for the company thanks to the key points from the 2017 model of the secure lens lock system, the wide field of vision, the pivoting outriggers ensuring a comfortable fit and a new tool-free way to fix the WFS roll-off cannisters that are now behind the outriggers. It means the second generation Prospect cannot be ignored when it comes to consideration of new riding protective eyewear.

The '18 line-up has ten different colours/schemes and here is our pick from the bunch.







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▼ BLAKE BAGGETT

ON THE AC...

Round seven of the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships took place at Southwick - a place that most MXGP riders would laugh at but is as sandy as it gets over here! The race returned in 2016 after a few years off the schedule and it's nice to have a surface that isn't the same as the other tracks. Most of our national tracks over here are prepped the same way (water and disked up!), form the same way and most riders run the same tires for eleven of the twelve rounds.

So it's good to see a sand track on the circuit and with that we saw a rider that has a lot of experience in the sand almost get his first American win. Dylan Ferrandis of the YamaLube Star Yamaha team went 1-2 to match Rockstar Husqvarna's Zach Osborne but the #16 got the overall and put some more points on his competition in the 250MX class.

One thing that we've seen whether it's Tyla Rattray, Ben Townley or Ken Roczen, when European-based riders come over here, they struggle to adapt to the national tracks with the limited practice schedule we have on race day. The one-day format and two fifteen minute practices do not allow much time to ride an unfamiliar course.

I spoke to Ferrandis last week and he confirmed that he was having some trouble with that aspect of American racing but his pure sand skills from years on the MXGP scene helped him out with a great race. He even fell in the first moto and still won!

Ferrandis spoke about how he's living his dream in America and he is indeed surprising himself with his rides this year which include two moto wins and supercross podiums.

I have to admit being surprised at Ferrandis's results and it's been a good signing for the squad one year after losing Cooper Webb and Jeremy Martin. Maybe he's opened the door for some other non-title-winning MXGP riders to head over here for 2018 and beyond.

Once touted as a can't-miss-kid, Monster Energy Pro Circuit's Adam Cianciarulo is just trying to not miss these days. Winner of a couple of supercrosses this year, it's weird to think that the former amateur star has never won an outdoor moto. Cianciarulo's missed a lot of time due to injuries and has been trying this year to break that jinx. If he doesn't pan-out to be what many thought he would be, it won't be from lack of trying or lacklustre rides...

Right now Adam's in a bit of a slump as the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships winds down (just five to go) but he's capable of more and at this point, talk is cheap for the kid. However he did grant me some time after South-



By Steve Matthes

wick to talk about his crummy day and riding in the sand.

If there's one track I would not want to fall twice on the first lap then it's Southwick. So, congrats on that. That started your day off awesomely...

I'm going to keep my tone upbeat in this interview because I don't want to be that depressing guy, but just know that I feel like drowning myself in a puddle right now.

Your face is all jacked up...

Yeah, there are a lot of things jacked up. My starts have been so bad. Seriously, if I was Mitch, I would make me race a 125 or something. I don't know. It's been awful. But first moto I was maybe in 15th or something on the first lap and I just [went] face first into a bank over there before that Buckley turn. Was already way behind the leaders, and then my bike was destroyed, bent up. I went into the next corner and tipped over and got stuck under the bike. I didn't catch anybody until three laps into the race, the last guy. I'm surprised I scored points, honestly. I thought they

were going to pull me off because I wasn't going to score points. But I got 15th. Second moto, locked bars with somebody right out of the gate. Came into the first corner and got stuck behind somebody crashed in front of me, so I was dead last. Came back to 9th.

You can't teach speed. Maybe that's the positive takeaway here?

I've been saying that for a long time now, and obviously being hurt and then coming back and it's the 'building' thing. That's kind of been the trend the last couple years, but I'm pretty 'over' just waiting for it to happen. It's time. I'm good enough. There's definitely another level I can go to. You see it with somebody like Osborne or J Mart where those are really the only guys that can...

But Osborne's, like, 40...

It is what it is. But that's still feasible on a 250F. You see another human being that can do it. That's the frustrating part for me. It's time for me to start executing every weekend. I've been doing it long enough now to where the mistakes, when they're there, they

should be either less or not as often. These last couple weekends it's just mistake after mistake.

Let's focus on the positive. I know from wrenching here and even racing here that it's a hard track to pass. So, when you're ripping through the pack in moto one, where were you getting the guys? And what were you doing to make up that ground?

I think those guys in the back are always looking for the smooth line. If you watch Osborne or J Mart or A Mart, Ferrandis, they don't care if it's smooth. They're looking for the radius and to carry momentum. You watch a million videos of Herlings and he'd even say the same thing – everybody tries to find the smooth line, but I just take the shortest way around and go right through the rough stuff. Everybody out there is good and they all deserve respect. I didn't pass a lot of factory guys today. It took me too long to get up there. There were a few guys I did in that second moto, but the other guys, it's easier to kind of out-will them into a corner. Just kind of break them. Just got to go for it.



fly racing

Just before we can highlight the new array of Fly Racing gear for 2018 here is another chance to appreciate some of the good work done by the Americans when it comes to their protection and safety items, the Revel Race chest protector in particular: a piece of kit now almost indispensable in motocross and firmly part of the rulebook. The Revel excels largely thanks to the CE triple layer memory foam (between the plastic shell and bio foam in contact with the rider), which optimises the buffer against rocks and general hard crap while also not significantly hiking up the weight. The ability to detach parts of the plastic casing to fully integrate any neck brace further increases the versatility. Waist buckles, multiple airflow channels, a low profile and easy washing are more benefits. At a reasonable 130 dollar price point the Revel Race comes in either white or black.



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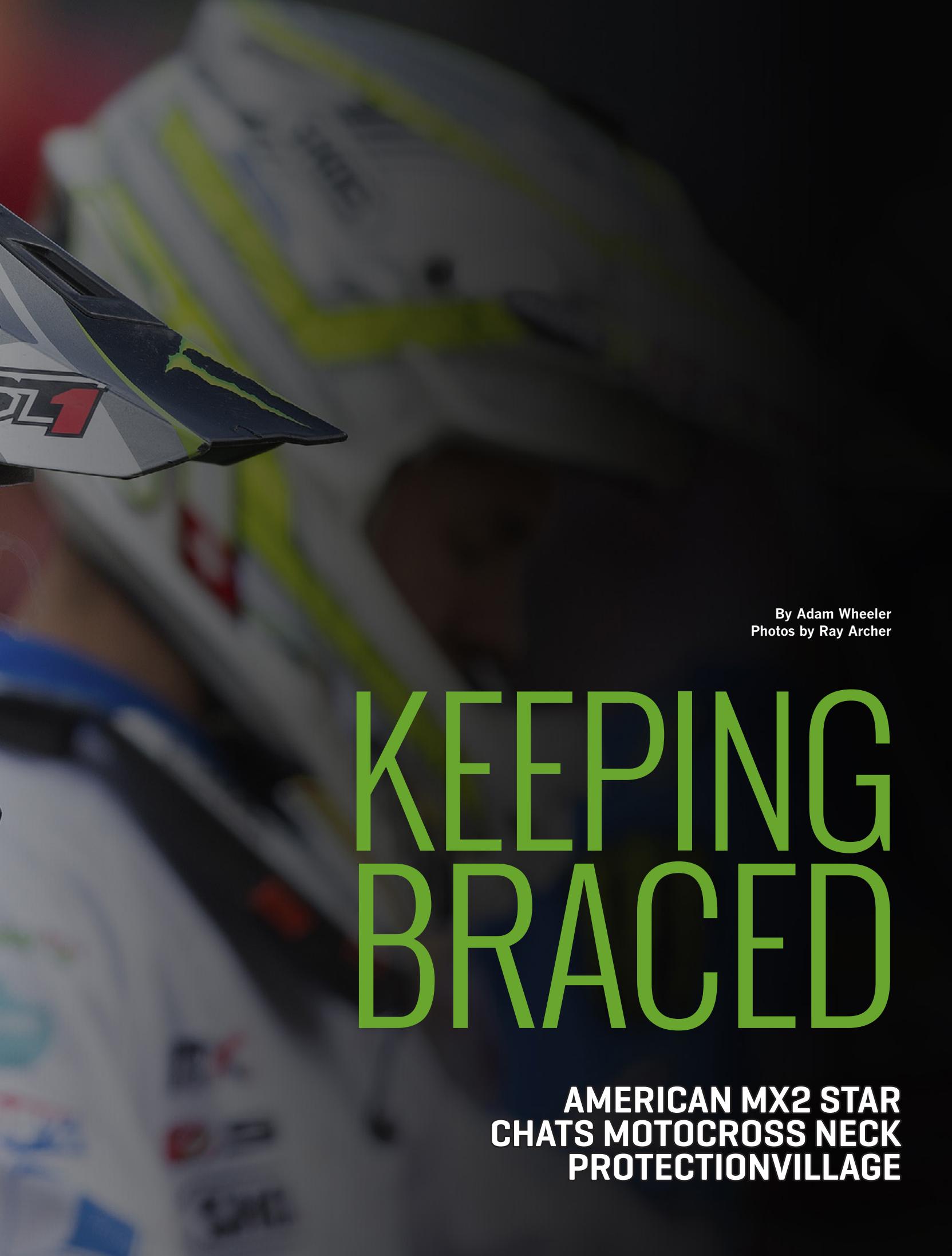


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O FEATURE





By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

KEEPING BRACED

AMERICAN MX2 STAR
CHATS MOTOCROSS NECK
PROTECTION VILLAGE

20 year old EMX250 European Championship race winner Darian Sanayei cannot be missed on the track for adoption of Atlas' Air neck brace as part of his Grand Prix racing kit and look with the Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki KX250F.

An FIM Motocross World Championship rookie, the American has nevertheless grabbed some attention (when able to get away from the gate) and proved he has the pace and aptitude to quickly be part of the front-runners in MX2.

With neck protection pioneers like Leatt and Atlas, Alpinestars and other brands like Ortema there is a range of choice when it comes to form, weight, fit and comfort and for how the technology disperses load and fills a safety role in the event of a crash.

"I THINK IT DEPENDS ON YOUR AGE AND YOUR BELIEF. IT IS DOWN TO PERSONAL PREFERENCE. I CHOOSE TO WEAR IT AND EVEN IF IT MAKES A 1% DIFFERENCE IN THE EVENT OF A CRASH THEN THAT IS ENOUGH FOR ME..."

Sanayei, like riders such as Evgeny Bobryshev, Rui Gonçalves and Jake Nicholls, has opted for the Atlas Air and we decided to ask why...

What's your attitude towards neck protection?

When they first came out my parents thought it would be good and smart to use one and I quickly got used to it. It feels comfortable and just a normal part of my kit. I think it helps and - although you don't quite know how much - you only need one instance where you think

'if only I had a neck brace on...' The Atlas feels really easy and doesn't bother me at all. I've been using different models since they came out but with Atlas just this year.

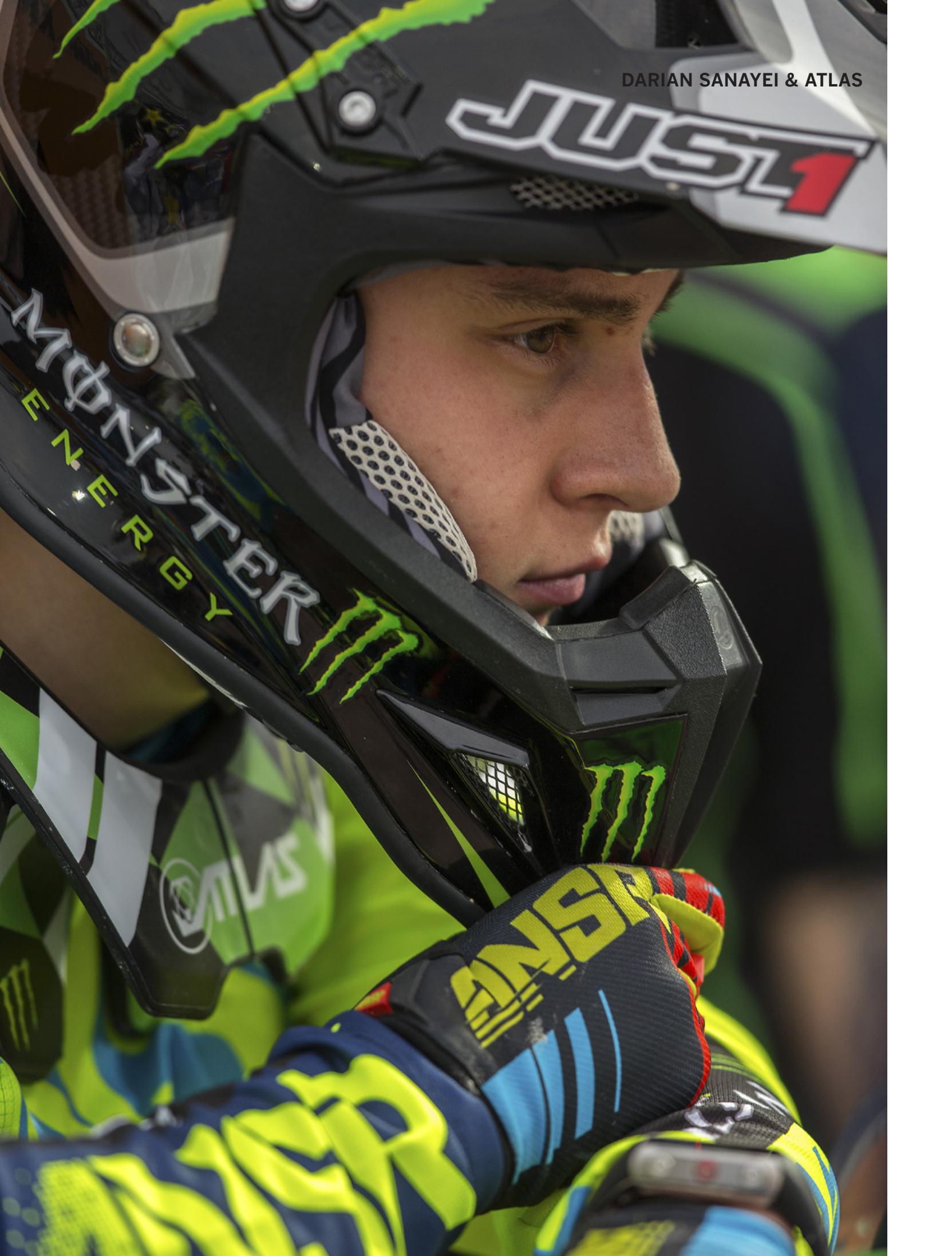
How is it little different? The build and architecture of it seems pretty simple...

Exactly. The weight and shape is something important. I hardly notice I have it on and it is definitely one of the most comfortable I've had. I would say I don't actively look for whatever protection I can get but I do like to use the best I can find...and also the best looking! I've experimented with different brands and Atlas was one of the top options out there. The fit was important to me, the look was also appealing and the fact that [Ryan] Villopoto was putting his belief and faith in the product was also enough for me. I had a choice of all of them and

I like the double post [strut] on the back and also the front, so it almost has 'suspension' and doesn't sit awkwardly on the collarbone.

What perceptions do you think people have about neck protection now?

I think it depends on your age and your belief and whether you're a bit old-school. It is down to personal preference. I choose to wear it and even if it makes a 1% difference in the event of a crash then that is enough for me. I'm sure people are still curious about neck protec-



DARIAN SANAYEI & ATLAS

FEATURE



DARIAN SANAYEI & ATLAS



tion but I don't get too many questions about it. I don't think it is such a big deal any more and quite a few guys go for it.

Do Atlas want feedback?

I'm just starting with them so they have sent me all the product and haven't yet met the guys face-to-face but they definitely want my feedback on what works for me and what could be changed or adjusted. I'm still using the same model they gave me at the beginning. I have a few and rotate through them but the first one has stood up well and I was able to put a graphics kit on top.

What would you change? And what do you like?

I like that it dries pretty quickly after washing, it doesn't really soak up the water and just runs off. I don't really have any words for how it could be better: I'd be making something up!



THREE AT THE FIRST BELL

Nine races in, and four weeks with nothing happening on track means time to look back at the first half of the 2017 MotoGP season. It has been a thrilling, entertaining, and informative opening half of the year, which has given us much to mull over. Here are three things we learned between Losail and the Sachsenring:

Tyres are the most important factor in racing...

Michelin's second year as official supplier to MotoGP has so far been a lot more consistent than the French tyre maker's first. With calamities avoided – no blowouts or delaminations this year, fortunately – the job of the factories and teams has been made a good deal easier. The profile of the tyres has been fixed, providing predictability in turn and feel. The construction has been mostly fixed, making response under braking and feel mid-corner predictable as well. Michelin are now focused (mainly) on sorting out compounds, and finding the right one for each particular track and temperature combination. This is not easy: the Michelin retain their historic trait of being rather sensitive to

temperature. The sweet spot for each compound is quite narrow, and getting the tyres into that temperature range and neither exceeding nor dropping out of it is not as simple as it was when Bridgestone were spec tyre supplier.

That weakness is also a strength, especially when combined with the balance of the Michelin. Where the Bridgestones were counter-intuitive, requiring blind faith in the front, the Michelin offer great grip at the rear and a lot less physical support from the front. In practice, this makes it much easier to get close to the limit, while making finding the absolute limit a risky affair. Because the limit of the tyres is closer, riders are riding to the edge of their machines and their ability. The result? The racing is closer,

and the best riders have to work that little bit harder to succeed.

There's no such thing as a Yamaha or Honda track...

A few years ago, I would start each race weekend by huddling together with veteran US commentator Dennis Noyes and try to figure out if the track we were at was a Yamaha track or a Honda track. On Sunday night, after we inevitably got it wrong (well, I did, Dennis was a lot better at the game than I was), we would dissect the conditions and try to see what effect they had. Did the Yamaha excel in cooler conditions? Was the Honda better in the heat? Did that mean the Yamaha ruled spring and autumn, while Honda blitzed the summer?

By David Emmett



What 2017 makes clear is that it isn't the track or the temperature that counts, it's the level of grip available. When grip is plentiful and consistent, the Yamahas clean up, as they did at the newly resurfaced Le Mans. When grip is scarce, because it's too hot, too cold, or just on a worn and ageing surface, the Hondas dominate, as they did at Jerez, and to a lesser extent at Barcelona. The Ducatis appear to sit somewhere in the middle, able to manage both conditions well. Which may be why Andrea Dovizioso led the championship after Assen, and is now just six points behind current leader Marc Marquez.

Character matters...

Compare and contrast the fortunes of the following riders: Maverick Viñales, Andrea Dovizioso, Andrea Iannone, and Aleix Espargaro. Though very different, Andrea Dovizioso and Aleix Espargaro embody the kind of positive work ethic and focused approach that is required of a modern MotoGP rider. Dovizioso put in four years of hard graft at Ducati on

woefully uncompetitive machinery to help create the Desmosedici GP17, a bike which is competitive despite a few flaws. Espargaro has lifted the Aprilia RS-GP from top ten to contending for top five – or at least he would, if the pneumatic valves would stop bouncing off the top of the pistons. Like Dovizioso, Espargaro is a grafter.

Viñales demonstrated his indisputable talent by winning the first two races of the season, adding a third victory at Le Mans, and managing tough conditions at Jerez. It was the culmination of the hard work and preparation put in over the winter, part of the Spaniard's master plan to take his first title. But there were times he did not deal well with setbacks. Poor results were put down to tyres – rightly or wrongly – and at times, Viñales looked as if he had just given up. But he didn't. He put his nose to the grindstone and entered the summer break in second place in the championship, just five points behind the leader, Marc Márquez.

Then there's Andrea Iannone. Iannone has struggled to adapt to the Suzuki, the bike requiring a radically different style to the one he learned on the Ducati. Instead of braking deep to the apex, he needs to get his braking done early then carry as much speed into the corner. Iannone's troubles seem to stem not so much from an inability to adapt, as a lack of interest in even trying. Suzuki sources report that the atmosphere in the garage is at an all-time low, and the paddock gossip circles are awash with (unverifiable) tales of Iannone preferring partying to training. Where the Instagram feeds of most riders are an unending sequence of them riding bicycles or MX bikes, or hitting the gym, Iannone's more closely resembles stills from HBO TV show 'Entourage'.

What will the second half of the season bring? Hopefully more of the same. Whoever masters the tyres and track conditions, and approaches the next three months with the right attitude will take the title at Valencia. It promises to be quite the journey.

Q FEATURE

THE PLACE TO BE?

GOING BEHIND THE SHINY WINDOWS OF THE MotoGP VIP VILLAGE

By Adam Wheeler

Photos kind courtesy of Dorna Sports



BEHIND THE VIP VILLAGE



FEATURE

I'm at a MotoGP race and I'm going where I shouldn't be allowed. Contrary to expectation my presence in the VIP Village at Jerez is met with an award-winning smile from the hostess at reception and I'm guided towards a wall rack of breakfast options. High-standing tables and stools are flanked by clear and purposeful décor, shimmering cutlery, HD pristine televisions and outside the burr of Moto3 bikes barrelling down the short start straight at Jerez filter through the large glass windows. To my right I can see a veranda of white ceramic looking furniture and a bar area, to my left a man sitting at table gestures animatedly to his guests/colleagues...perhaps he is about to close a large deal.

We are in another sphere of MotoGP. A world of corporate hospitality, entertainment, back-slapping, business and high-end movers. It is an environment largely out of reach to the average race fan – but like travelling in business or first class on a plane – it somehow has to be tried just once.

My brief exploration of the VIP Village permits a swift munch of a croissant and a tour around some of the private areas hired by partners and sponsors of the series and the opulence within.

At Jerez it's a busy place and I cannot help but wonder how an elite enterprise such as this has steered its way through the austerity of recent years and even some of the cost-cutting hours and meetings that have shaped MotoGP itself. Do people want or can afford or relish the kind of treatment found in such an establishment and with the howl of engines and smell of race garages in close proximity? The an-

swer mostly comes from the amount of seats occupied and the shoulders of Armani shirts rubbing with the yellow of garish #46 t-shirts but to gain more knowledge on the role of the service we were kindly afforded some time with Dorna Sports' Griselda Foguet (Corporate Hospitality Director, Commercial) and Manuel Ortiz (Corporate Hospitality Director, Production); the two principle overseers of the VIP Village.



Apparently a team of just eight people look after corporate hospitality throughout the championship and the department based in Sant Just just outside Barcelona is divided into three areas: commercial, production and operations. They enlist partners at each race for marquees, structures and catering; the food companies use their own teams and the staff numbers depend on the size of the event and attendance. Dorna also hire reception staff and BMW drivers for additional extras like the service road tour and shuttles.

"The VIP Village has evolved quite a lot in terms of structures and catering services; which are the fundamental parts of our packet of services," says Foguet, part of Dorna since 2004. "We have been adapting to the new circuits

"WE HAVE NOTICED A BIG GROWTH IN INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS SINCE WE OPENED SALES THROUGH THE WEBSITE AND SHOWS THE WIDE FANBASE WE HAVE FOR MOTOGP..."

and the needs of the clients and partners. There have been some important changes in general to MotoGP. The series has grown and changed a lot, especially with technology and the shape of the categories and the VIP Village is always trying to move with the necessities of the championship and our clients. There is always space to improve and change."

Ortiz has accumulated twelve seasons with Dorna but on the logistics side and dealing with infrastructure with the circuits. "I was working with Philip Morris before and could see the VIP Village from the other side, that of a client, sponsor and agency and slightly differently. When you are on the inside then you get an appreciation for how it has evolved in terms of catering, organisation, the structures of the marquees and materials, sales and so on."

People might see the VIP Village as just a nice plate of food and a decent place to watch the race so there has to be some marketing involved to reveal the full range of advantages like the parking, tours, guests etc...

Griselda: The hospitality is created to offer a space for

comfort where a client can be all day - or just for the time of the sport event - that is more premium than any other entrance ticket. We offer gourmet catering to a high level in an accommodating, air-conditioned environment and – as you mentioned – the parking space is fundamental because some circuits have very restricted space so to be able to enter and park your own



car is an authentic VIP service. There is still a wide road to explore when it comes to entertainment and the technical side. Everything is evolving very fast and we are continuing to look how we can tie into the sport and make it part of the hospitality package.

Has their been progress in terms of what the circuits can offer, the materials to enable full possibilities to the client and the general experience of the customer?

Griselda: I think the VIP service was born to offer something important to our best and biggest sponsors and where teams and partners could invite their closest clients and perform PR. It has grown, even if the goal of

FEATURE

"DO PEOPLE WANT OR CAN AFFORD THE KIND OF TREATMENT FOUND IN SUCH AN ESTABLISHMENT AND WITH THE HOWL OF ENGINES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY? THE ANSWER COMES FROM THE AMOUNT OF SEATS OCCUPIED AND THE SHOULDERS OF ARMANI SHIRTS RUBBING WITH THE YELLOW OF GARISH #46 T-SHIRTS..."

the service has always been the same with respect to the space and what we offer and in relation to the price and market value. I think we have really improved a lot with the level of service when it comes to making a space that is tailor-made to a client. We've looked at other events and then what we can provide and what requirements we can satisfy and I think it is a really competitive product, very much in line with the big brands and companies and what they desire from an event like ours.

Manuel: When it comes to the circuits then I've seen a big evolution. Whether it is new places like COTA or some of the older places like Misano then the provisions have changed. If you talk about something like Apps then perhaps that technical part is an element that we are just beginning to explore a lot more and we're in a transition phase because MotoGP is obviously a sport that pushes the technical edge. We are quite tra-

ditional in some ways but we are also exploring new ways and trends.

How is the priority within Dorna for the VIP Village? If you see something like the TV package and department then it is cutting-edge and all-encompassing...

Manuel: We have a good budget and I think the company is very conscious of the need for good corporate hospitality but as we're responsible for the VIP Village we always want more! More budget and more possibilities to offer something better, however we're quite content with the distribution of resources comparatively among the departments of the company. MotoGP is a sport of passion and is enjoyed from the stands and the TV and I think we offer another important experience, and I know other departments recognise this when it comes to sponsors and customers that come to the race.

Is there a real diversity within the VIP Village? You must be victims to the circuit infrastructure?

Manuel: It depends on the track but we basically have two locations, which is the terrace of the main building or grandstand or the ground level somewhere. Dorna's contract with the circuits is for only one week, so from Sunday before to the Sunday of the race but construction needs two weeks, one before and after. In a back-to-back like Mugello and Catalunya one team has been building while another has been dismantling and moving straight to Holland and Assen. We have a partner – ENG – that has been twenty-five years as part of the world championship and is able to offer the quantity of material to double or triple the structures and the personnel to be able to do the job. In the Grand Prix of Catalunya – for example – we'll count on a team of about 130 people with about 25-30 for catering. Logistics gets very complicated for back-to-back races and even when there is just one weekend between GPs.

In Valencia the VIP Village is its own compound and two floors: is that the trickiest one?

Manuel: No, that's actually one of the easier ones! It's perhaps the biggest, together

BEHIND THE VIP VILLAGE



with Misano, but because we are on ground level we don't have to worry about cranes or lifting and moving all the material around tight places. Also being outside of the paddock has its benefits and the build is more simple and straightforward.

Griselda: Valencia is one of the best attended but Misano and Catalunya are also popular. Misano has a good attendance but we're limited with space and usually have a nice

spot around the circuit. On the terrace there in Italy we cannot accommodate 1300 people. We've seen a lot of demand around Misano in the last two years.

Is there room or possibilities to offer a lower spec of the VIP Village?

Griselda: I wouldn't rule it out and we've looked at other options to offer hospitality but we haven't found a way to make it work or would be at-

tractive to the market. It's very possible but if I think if we created something different then it would be a pack that is even more exclusive. Groups that have prominent presence in the VIP Village can now take part in the podium ceremony with access to the Parc Ferme alongside the teams. We'd like to offer more experiences like that but of course it couldn't be for every client of the VIP Village.

Manuel: Other possibilities for this type of thing also depends on the tracks and whether the 'extra' we could offer would work financially. A place like Brno is very restricted and we're already at the maximum with 600 places so to move outside and do something extra means looking at the balance of cost and income.

How has the reaction of the people been in the last five years? Do people want more for less? How is the market?

Griselda: We have noticed a big growth in individual clients since we opened sales through the website and in international purchases for other events, which shows the wide fanbase we have for MotoGP and the amount of people that are prepared to pay an average of 800 euros a race. There have been critical moments in the market, especially in Spain and Italy, but there has been sufficient interest in MotoGP for people to keep taking the [VIP Village] space for their clients. The championship itself and what is happening among the riders means we have some incredible events and there is big interest in making business here.

Back in Jerez and the size and resources offered to companies like Estrella Galí-



BEHIND THE VIP VILLAGE



cia, Ducati, Monster Energy, Repsol, GoPro, Red Bull and more is dazzling but there are many other ‘residents’ occupying space. One such client is Pole Position Travel, an agency specialising in MotoGP event experiences and packages. “We have been official agents since 2004 but selling since 2003 and I would say we’ve sold over 3500 VIP Village [tickets] from 2005 and from the point where we started trading as Pole Position Travel,” says MD Gordon Howell. “Add the early years plus private suites and staff and other miscellaneous sales and we are at about 4000.”

“I would say especially for the fly-aways, the value for money is superb considering the paddock access,” he adds. “For those events the VIP Vil-

lage is the only way to go for most. All - apart from Phillip Island - give you full paddock access and general admission. In general, the food is always great, and the bars are almost always the best at the circuits.”

“Like all purchases, it comes down to client needs - for corporate purposes, the VIP Village should be a first choice. It also features pit lane walks which are generally not available elsewhere,” continues Howell who ranks the three best European MotoGP VIP Village experiences as Austria, Catalunya and Sachsenring for views, paddock, general admission and service road drives. “We consider ourselves ‘Honest brokers’ and try to get to know our clients’ concerns and then recommend the best

FEATURE

hospitality option; but we always consider the VIP Village in any recommendation."

Asking other VIP Village users for their views reveals a few interesting comments flying around on the range of facilities really on offer (grandstand seats and viewing possibilities) to small details like availability of race programmes and information to clients; a more important factor to the casual visitor as opposed to say a MotoGP fan who will know the schedule, names and numbers. Encouragingly Dorna embrace the chance and opportunity to advance.

How do you feel about feedback? Especially about such a premium product where it can be very hit-and-miss with first time MotoGP visitors?

Manuel: We ask for it because it's important for growth.

Griselda: We send an email after an event to all clients asking for feedback and their level of satisfaction. Normally we have comments that people have enjoyed the experience and really like what was on offer...but it also depends on the race and whether it rained a lot of whether the client found the parking further than they imagined, heavy traffic arriving or leaving the circuit. There are always areas or circumstances where the client



might not have had the best experience and we hear everything, even if they concern issues that are not directly related to us. In general the level of satisfaction is high. The main suggestions normally involve better access to the paddock or closer access to the riders and we look at them and others to think how we can improve.

Have you ever had to deal with any rowdy groups?!

Manuel: Ha! They are pretty well behaved but each has their own identity. For example Monster Energy always like DJs and live music...but we are open to any kind of idea and suggestion that respects the rest of the VIP Village.

I have 1000 euros to enjoy a VIP Village experience: where should I go?

Griselda: I would say Mugello.

Manuel: I would say Jerez.

Why?

Griselda: Well, the VIP Village area and structure is actually the same at both events and there is little change but the circuit at Mugello, for me, is spectacular and the impact of the 'Rossi Effect' and for how long it lasts is very special in that Tuscan area.

Manuel: For almost the same reasons I would say Jerez! The atmosphere, the passionate fans and the track is pretty special with a lot of bike tradition for a lot of years.



DASH IT ALL

A small snippet of news, hidden toward the bottom of an FIM press release, may have passed you by the week before the Sachsenring. Nearing the end of a exhausting four-race-in-five-week-slog, the FIM, the sport's governing body, announced 'virtual pit boards' – a means of teams sending messages to riders' dashboards during free practice, qualifying and races – could be used from race nine of the 2017 campaign onward.

Rather than relying on the insufficient once a lap regularity of a pit board, riders can now read a variety of fairly simple messages, taken from a pre-compiled list, throughout a race as their teams see fit. What's more, the messages will be hooked up to Dorna's live TV feed, giving viewers a rare, fly-on-the-wall look at, well, riders' dashboards.

On the face of it, the 'MotoGP Whatsapp Group' - a phrase coined by one Spanish journalist - will be another facet of the hi-res gadgetry that makes the normally exceptional coverage sparkle. What's not to love? I mean, why wait impatiently for camera shots of a pit board when you can have a digitalised version nestling to the bottom

left of your TV screen? That's what technology is all about, right? Delivering information quicker, in a smaller, sharper, more digestible form. The graphics can change year-to-year and teams will have a list of set phrases they can choose from, which could well resemble a drunken teen's late night text to a flighty sixth form fancy. In beautiful HD, our screens will be adorned with 'want 2 c u - time to pit' or 'plz go faster'. What a time to be alive.

Riders agreed to the measure in a recent safety commission as information can be relayed. In more immediate circumstances, giving them a wider view of somewhat chaotic events from their own limited vantage point.

But flashing screens and gimmickry aside, there is the serious question of whether this new strand of technology is simply change masquerading as progress. Don't get me wrong, in recent times, Dorna's judgement on bettering the spectacle has been sound. And there should be no limit placed on technology making certain elements of the show easier, either. It has proved effective in recent months whereby race direction can make riders aware of red or black flags by way of signalling on their dashboard. Flag marshals are no longer the sole means of relaying a message. This, however, is vital information, which carries a certain heft regarding rider safety.



By Neil Morrison

Call me old fashioned, but this new ‘virtual pit board’ technology seems a touch unnecessary. Eugene Laverty sardonically put it best in the summer of last year, when the idea was first floated, stating: “Maybe instead of doing it in every checkpoint and sector, we just do it once a lap. Someone could hold out, like, a pit board. It’s safer and you’ve got a straight line to look at it.” Gaps, lap times, descriptions of an opponent’s whereabouts, and a demand requiring riders to pit can all be displayed on a pit board. Riders do see this once every 90 seconds. So why complicate it further in the name of TV spectacle?

There is an issue of safety, too. A rider has enough to comprehend manoeuvring a 260bhp machine around a certain stretch of tight tarmac without considering a possible coded message flashing before his eyes. Aleix Espargaro spoke of two recent instances when a rider ahead was losing drive on the straight mid-straight due to excessive tyre spin. “If you

check on the straight, because, believe me, with a MotoGP this is the only place, and if the rider in front of you have some problem you hit him.” A possible consequence of taking an eye off the game.

What may be of even greater worry is that this is the first step toward allowing greater outside interference with the game at play. At the heart of it, grand prix racing has always been one rider against twenty others for forty minutes. No amount of technical know-how, or strategic savvy in pit lane can make a difference in real time, if, for example, rain begins to fall, or a lead starts to get hacked away. So why let teams interfere, even if it is on a minute basis?

Cast your mind back to recent flag-to-flag encounters at Misano in ‘15 and the Sachsenring a year later. Truly unique conditions in both instances, which allowed two outsiders in the circumstances (Marc Marquez and Bradley Smith in ‘15 then Marquez a year later) to gauge

conditions in real time, take the risk, and allow their ability to do the rest. It led to somewhat strange results, but on those given days they out-thought and out-smarted the rest. Aside from ability, shouldn’t there be a window to allow that? Different personalities – and MotoGP has plenty of those – judge situations in different ways. What may have been otherwise uninspired encounters took on a different look, and intrigue abounded.

Unsurprisingly Smith was the one MotoGP rider heavily opposed to the introduction of the measure, arguing against it in the Riders’ Safety Commission at Assen. “It’s just another security net to manipulate a championship into the guys only finishing on the podium are on the best bikes. Where it should actually be that certain advantages come when a person makes a right call. And why did they make the right call? Because they took a gamble and it paid off.”

And furthermore, once this is introduced, a year or two down the line, surely there will be calls for a more effective means of communication, such as radio earpieces. Valentino Rossi has expressed his hope this will come to fruition. It has just been OK-ed in World Endurance Racing. Worryingly, this would take the sport even closer to the benign, banal F1 spectacle, where vacuous platitudes somehow pass as valid expressions of emotion.

The packaging of MotoGP has come a long way in recent years. But, for many, the beauty of Sunday still lies in riders taking to the track, using their own minds to manage the circumstances thrown at them and the sense of mystery that goes with it. It's a human sport, and in a time of increasing electronic and technological sophistication every measure should be taken to preserve this.





FEATURE

WE WERE GIVEN A TOUR AND EXPLANATION OF SHOEI'S MOTOGP RACE SERVICE TO UNDERSTAND A LITTLE OF WHAT GOES INTO HELMET PREP FOR ATHLETES AT THE TOP LEVEL OF THE RACING GAME...

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by CormacGP



HEAD



LONG

FEATURE



Paddock scooters buzz around dropping off and picking up. Riders' assistants and team personnel carry helmet bags like loaves of bread. Among the small trucks parked in one line of the MotoGP paddock that could be deemed 'service partners' at the Sachsenring in Germany, Shoei have their distinctive black/grey race wagon that is overseen and controlled by fast-talking Frenchman Michaël Rivoire. Still the scooters arrive, dispense and depart with Arai and HJC and more suppliers also in close proximity; probably leathers and other errands have to be done at the end of a busy day of practice.

Inside Shoei's small corner of MotoGP 'Mica' – who has been a Shoei employee for two decades and has totalled nine seasons in MotoGP/SBK as the Race Service Technician – shows us his work bay with the lids of Marc Marquez, Bradley Smith, Mattia Pasini and more in state on the shelving behind him and a bench full of intricate tools and decals ready for his work prepping the helmets for the Japanese's relatively small rider roster.

"From Friday to Sunday I take care of the helmets for twelve riders: two in MotoGP, six in Moto2 and four in Moto3," says Rivoire, who hails from a town close to Lyon. "Most of the job is in cleaning, drying and replacing tear-offs and changing visor when it is needed. Before the racing season we have to prepare the helmet and that happens in winter testing. We make the main fitting, the tint of visor the rider prefers for the race and the number of tear-offs. The tests are also a time to try new things for certain conditions and we have a strip that prevents rain coming in the visor and doesn't affect ventilation. The air can come in through the cheekpad but not the water. This was a technical solution we found with my Japanese and American colleagues."

"When it comes to the GPs then on Thursday the preparation based on these settings are done. Each rider will have 4-6 helmets and I'll ask them to bring three on Thursday which I will make ready for dry, wet and then in consideration of the weather forecast.

O FEATURE



It is also possible that a helmet will arrive on Thursday that has come directly from a painter so it will be stripped and that is the time when I will make the assembly, glue the rubber and attach everything."

Brands like Alpinestars make a hefty deal about the role that racing plays in the development of their products and how use of materials, prototypes and ideas at the highest levels and extreme conditions can filter into what the customer can use and benefit from on the road or in every day use. It is no surprise that Shoei adopt a similar view in MotoGP but the rate of experimentation is not that severe and even more eye-opening is that fact that the world champion's X-Spirit III

lid features barely any special 'factory' components compared to the very same replica found in the shops. We expected the products to be close, after all it is a great marketing angle, but Rivoire is adamant that Shoei's star riders all use the company's boxed efforts.

"Development happens throughout the season," says Rivoire. "My role is primarily geared around race helmets and Japanese R&D will work around all the information I, and my colleagues, can submit. We find some tricks or adjustments, and some can be adapted for production. Sometimes we have special parts to try and the rider will test and we'll give the feedback."



"Marc is very easy to work with and his helmets, all of them actually, are the same that you can find in the shop. The only difference is in the design and the painting," he adds. "A customer will go into a shop and buy an X-Spirit III (X-Fourteen in the US) small size, just like his, and the only difference is that the padding size will be a standard 35 and Marc uses a 39. You can also buy the pads to have the same fitting if you want! There is zero difference. It happened recently in Superbike actually. A rider crashed in first practice and second practice and then had to go to town close to Imola to buy a stock Shoei; he was a Monster rider so I had some stickers and was able to prepare another helmet to go. The visors are the same but some of the tints are too dark for the road and they are not allowed."

"To fully assemble one helmet I need almost one hour so if you have to clean and dry helmets for riders in other classes...it means sometimes you miss lunch!"

Rivoire's role is reactive. He has to work and adapt his timetable according to the travails of his riders on track. "Mattia Pasini crashed this morning and I could see from the shell that it was pretty badly damaged. There were some cracks in the liner and, basically, it is 'dead', there is no protection on that side and the helmet is finished. I cut the chin strap away, take away padding and it will go back to the rider who will use it as a gift for a sponsor or something similar."

He also has to cater for some of the unusual configurations of his athlete flock.

O FEATURE



"Thomas Luthi has an XS size and the biggest pads I have; each time he takes off his helmet I am afraid for his vertebrae! But that is his preference. Some have it very loose and that's not a problem because we did some tests – thanks to people like Marc, Eugene Laverty, some Japanese riders and even robots that can be pushed into different positions in the wind tunnel – to develop this special edge that helps drive air around the helmet; Adam Norrodin can ride with the helmet quite loose as a result."

A slice of Rivoire's role involves representation for Shoei in the biggest international motorcycle racing 'shop window'; it forms a strut and reasoning for the thousands of kilometres and hundreds of boxes of materials and components he moves through each year to enact the practical provision he provides for the athletes under the company's umbrella.

"My job is part marketing – to show Shoei in the best light and we work on the image of the brand – and another part R&D," he explains.

**RIVOIRE'S ASSERTION AS TO WHY SHOEI IS REGARDED AS ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST SOUGHT-AFTER HELMETS IN THE MARK COMES RAPIDLY AND PASSIONATELY:
"LIKE I SAID, IT IS BECAUSE OF THE R&D AND THE COMMITMENT OF PEOPLE AROUND THIS BRAND."**

A rider's lid is often the most recognisable element of their identity while on the bike. Individuals like Marquez and Jorge Lorenzo and especially Valentino Rossi change the look and theme frequently. For Rivoire it can mean a revolving cycle of helmets coming from a spread of countries. "Marc has a special helmet in Spain and it's designed by David Mata who won a contest two years ago and he understands what Marc wants. I'm then in charge of the painting with a company in France. His special helmet for the Japanese GP is designed with Marc and painted by Shoei and that goes for most of his helmets but other riders have other painters."

"So the feedback from the rider is very important. I think we are the company that spends the most when it comes to research and development and for time and money."

Rivoire is a gregarious character ("Motocross? When some of my riders bring their motocross helmets and they are full of dust – pfff – I am very busy") and his assertion as to why Shoei is regarded as one of the best and most sought-after helmets in the mark comes just as rapidly and passionately: "Like I said, it is because of the R&D and the commitment of people around this brand."

Words by Roland Brown,
Photos by Markus Jahn & Daniel Kraus

SOMETHING SUMPTUOUS



BMW HP4 RACE





A glance at the specification of BMW's HP4 Race is enough to confirm that this track-only machine is special even by limited-edition superbike standards. Its race-tuned four-cylinder engine produces 212bhp, which is 16bhp more than the mighty S1000RR. At just 171.4kg with fuel, the HP4 Race weighs 35kg less than the RR; less even than a factory Superbike.

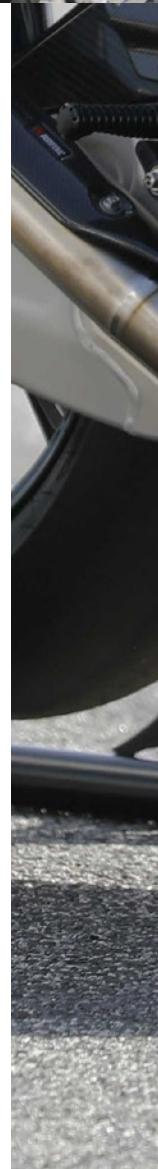
That remarkable lightness is partly due to a frame and wheels made from carbon-fibre, plus a selection of high-level components including factory-level Öhlins suspension. The FGR300 forks alone cost over 12,000 euros, which helps explain why the 750 bikes are priced at 80,000 euros apiece, or £68,000 in the UK.

But if all that makes the BMW sound as irrelevant as it is fast, the opposite is true. The HP4 Race might just be the most significant bike for years, because its carbon frame and wheels are revolutionary. Instead of being laboriously and expensively

hand-built, like previous carbon components, they are mechanically produced in a couple of hours, using a process called Resin Transfer Moulding that engineers in BMW's motoring division developed for the i3 electric and i8 hybrid cars.

Given that RTM-produced carbon also has an advantage over aluminium not just in weight but also strength, corrosion resistance and precisely computer-controlled rigidity levels, it's possible that the composite material could take over from aluminium, much as aluminium did from steel in the Eighties with models including Suzuki's GSX-R750. And maybe for more than just frames.

The Race's 999cc, 16-valve engine is contrastingly conventional. BMW supplies race teams with S1000RR-based engines of various specification; this one combines a Superbike crankshaft with an endurance valve train to provide the necessary longevity.



BMW HP4 RACE



“THIS BRILLIANTLY CRAFTED TWO-WHEELED WEAPON CERTAINLY OFFERS THRILLING SPEED AND COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE TO RIDERS WHO CAN AFFORD IT, WHETHER THEY PLAN TO RIDE IT ON TRACK DAYS OR IN THE SENIOR TT...”



BMW HP4 RACE





As well as its race-ready injection system and titanium Akrapovic exhaust, the Race has a sophisticated electronics package giving 15 levels of traction control and engine braking plus five-way wheelie control, all programmable for each of the close-ratio box's six gears.

Potential for chassis fine-tuning is similarly enormous. Frame inserts allow tweaking of steering geometry and swing-arm pivot. Shock length and linkage can also be adjusted, along with preload and damping of the Öhlins forks and TTX36 GP shock. There's also potential for adjusting the footrests and seat, the latter by varying the attachment of the self-supporting carbon rear subframe.

Thankfully the HP4 Race requires minimal setting-up to be brilliantly fast and easy to ride, as a blast around the Estoril circuit near Lisbon confirmed. My view over the

carbon-covered aluminium tank was of a large digital dashboard, a machined top yoke with small plaque showing which of the 750 machines this was (No.000, in this pre-production bike's case), and clip-ons with Smartie-style coloured buttons, to adjust traction control, engine braking and the four engine power modes.

Regardless of mode, the BMW was stunningly fast and deliciously precise. The engine pulled crisply from surprisingly low revs, then almost ripped the bars from my hands as it gathered torque through the midrange, going through the close-ratio box almost as fast as I could click gears even with help of the two-way quick-shifter.

Brakes and suspension were equally impressive. The Brembos are as used in WSBK and even MotoGP, featuring nickel-plated calipers and titanium pistons.

Into the slightly downhill first turn the front stopper generated wrist-punishing retardation as it buried the Pirelli Diablo SC2 slick into the track, while the Öhlins front end provided flawless feedback and control.

The section that highlighted the chassis' quality best was the chicane towards the end of the lap, which leads uphill into a long right-hander. The BMW flicked from left to right near-instantaneously, then accelerated at jaw-dropping pace despite still being cranked hard over, its exhaust note stuttering as the traction control cut in.

This brilliantly crafted two-wheeled weapon certainly offers thrilling speed and competitive performance to riders who can afford it, whether they plan to ride it on track days or in the Senior TT.

But it is as the machine that paves the way for much less expensive, volume-produced bikes with carbon-fibre chassis that the HP4 Race is likely to be remembered.



BMW, who have produced over 80,000 units of the i3 and i8, are giving little away. "The reason we're making 750 units of the HP4 Race is that it's a special bike – the fastest, most exclusive bike that BMW Motorrad has ever made," says Rudi Schneider, head of the firm's multi-cylinder platform. Schneider previously led development of the similarly exotic HP4, which pioneered semi-active suspension – a technology which, five years later, is available on a variety of mass-produced models, from dual-purpose R1200GS to K1600 tourer.



Could the HP4 Race herald a similarly rapid expansion, perhaps starting soon with a carbon-framed S1000RR? "Today I cannot say, but what I can say is that we have made the step to industrialise the carbon frame, and that is the most important step," Schneider says. "We couldn't build 10,000 frames like this today, but this will be the next step. Now we can think what comes in the future."



Photo by GeeBee Images







**ON
TRACK
OFF
ROAD**



'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.

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